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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 28 February 2008, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Ban Ki-moon (Secretary-General)
Chairman: Mr. Natalegawa .....(Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Opening of the session by the Secretary-General

1. **The Temporary Chairman** said that he was pleased to speak before the Special Committee as it began a new session for 2008. Over the last six decades, decolonization had transformed the membership of the United Nations. All over the world, hundreds of millions of people had exercised their right to self-determination, and had achieved self-government. Facilitating that process constituted one of the proudest chapters of the Organization's history. However, that chapter was still being written. Today, there were 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories remaining on the agenda of the United Nations. Until their status was satisfactorily resolved, the ideals of the General Assembly Declaration on decolonization would remain unfulfilled. Thus, as the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism came to an end, the members of the Special Committee must continue to advance the decolonization process in the Territories.

2. Towards the end of 2007, the Pacific Territory of Tokelau had held a referendum on the question of self-government in free association with New Zealand, its administering Power. While that referendum had fallen just short of the two-thirds majority needed for a change in status, the fact that the people of Tokelau had had the opportunity to freely express their will with regard to their own future was an important step forward. The referendum stood out for the constructive spirit with which the Government of New Zealand and the people of Tokelau had approached the question. He was confident that the two sides would maintain a constructive dialogue as they charted the road ahead.

3. Tokelau was a commendable example of what could be achieved when there was political will and close cooperation. He hoped that it would inspire other administering Powers and the people in the Territories to find innovative and practical ways to advance the decolonization process. In that context, he applauded the emphasis on productive cooperation between the Special Committee and the administering Powers, while always bearing in mind the interests of the Territories. He appealed to all parties to engage in a transparent and creative dialogue to ensure that the views of the peoples of the remaining Territories were heard. For its part, the Secretariat would do all it could to fully support the vital work of the Special Committee. He wished it every success in the year ahead.

Adoption of the agenda

4. *The agenda was adopted.*

Election of officers

5. *Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia) was elected Chairman, Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) and Mr. Okio (Congo) were elected Vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur, by acclamation.*

6. *Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia) took the Chair.*

7. **The Chairman** said that the delegations of Argentina, Brazil, Burundi, Lebanon, Malaysia, Peru, Spain, Thailand and Turkey had indicated their wish to participate as observers in the opening meeting of the Special Committee.

8. He expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for convening and opening the first meeting of the sixty-third session of the Special Committee. His presence and words of support demonstrated the continued commitment of the Secretariat, at the highest level, to the cause of decolonization and the work of the Committee.

9. Historically, decolonization had been one of the Organization's most challenging and successful mandates. Since the establishment of the United Nations, nearly 750 million people had exercised their right to self-determination, and more than 80 formerly colonized territories had gained independence.

10. However, despite all the achievements made, decolonization remained an unfinished business for the United Nations. It must therefore continue to give decolonization a high priority and seek effective ways to accelerate the process of decolonization in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. With less than three years to go before the end of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the Special Committee faced the formidable challenge of resolving "permanent" international political status of those Territories in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

11. As the main United Nations body devoted to the cause of decolonization, it was essential for the Special

Committee to uphold its responsibilities towards the Non-Self-Governing Territories that remained within its purview. In view of the limited progress made in the area of decolonization in recent years, there was an urgent need for the international community to establish a compelling and promising basis for its approach to decolonizing the Territories that directly involved all concerned. The Special Committee must therefore urgently identify innovative ways, means and options to that end.

12. It was important to approach each case with an open mind, to build on the available options and to bring about a pragmatic, results-oriented evolution of positions that would help to move the decolonization process forward. Each Territory had different needs and expectations and should therefore be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Special Committee needed to take a more pragmatic approach, to leave its comfort zone and to make a genuine effort to address the concerns and interest of all relevant stakeholders, particularly the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and the administering Powers.

13. The full implementation and completion of the United Nations decolonization mandate could succeed only as a collaborative effort by the international community, the administering Powers and the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories themselves. The peoples of the Territories must have information on the range of decolonization options before them under General Assembly resolutions in order to be in a position to express their will. The administering Powers also needed to work within the parameters of the options enshrined in General Assembly resolutions in order to advance status-related discussion in their respective Non-Self-Governing Territories in a manner that was suitable for prospective international scrutiny and approval.

14. In that connection, the Government of New Zealand should be commended for its laudable efforts with respect to Tokelau. While that Territory was in a period of reflection following the results of the previous year's referendum, the Government of New Zealand had committed itself to continuing to provide constructive support to Tokelau in its search for a self-governing future. All other administering Powers should follow suit in their efforts to achieve real and meaningful collaboration with the Committee.

15. For their part, members of the Special Committee should reaffirm their commitment both to genuine and constructive dialogue with all stakeholders and to providing all possible support to the Non-Self-Governing Territories for the establishment of conditions that would enable them, through an internationally valid act of self-determination, to demonstrate their preference regarding their respective status.

16. On behalf of his own country, Indonesia, he was privileged to have the opportunity to act as Chairman of the Special Committee in 2008. Indonesia attached great importance to the work of the Special Committee and it was indeed a great honour to have been entrusted with such a task.

Organization of work (A/AC.109/2008/L.1 and L.2)

17. **The Chairman** drew attention to a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/AC.109/2008/L.1, indicating to the Committee the resolutions and decisions relevant to the work of the Special Committee for the current year. The Committee also had before it for consideration document A/AC.109/2008/L.2, which contained a note by the Chairman concerning the Committee's organization of work, programme of work and timetable. Every effort would be made to complete the Committee's work well before the end of June 2008 so that all its reports could be made available to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session.

18. He took it that the Committee wished to approve its proposed organization of work for the current year.

19. *It was so decided.*

20. **Ms. Núñez Mordoche** (Cuba) reaffirmed her delegation's full commitment to the vitally important work of the Special Committee and assured the Chairman of Cuba's continued support.

21. **Mr. Aisi** (Papua New Guinea) said that the Special Committee still had to resolve outstanding issues with respect to the 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories. In that connection, his delegation agreed on the need for the Special Committee to adopt the innovative approach outlined by the Chairman and for the administering Territories to be fully engaged in the decolonization process.

22. **Mr. Okio** (Congo), Vice-Chairman, said that the Special Committee should be guided in its work by the

approach set out by the Chairman and that it must do its utmost to meet the expectations of those living in the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

23. **Mr. Gregoire** (Dominica) said that the Special Committee must find a way to stimulate the implementation of the decolonization process. To that end, it must reorder the steps in the case-by-case workplan so that it could initiate an in-depth review of the political arrangements governing each Territory. Thus far, the review had been insufficient because the Special Committee routinely lacked sufficient analysis of the situation on the ground, particularly in the small island Territories.

24. It was imperative for the Special Committee to implement the Plan of Implementation of the Decolonization Mandate 2006-2007, to assign agreed duties to the wider United Nations system and to make use of the independent expertise on offer. In that way, it would gain a more comprehensive picture of the prevailing political arrangements. The reluctance to do so continued to frustrate the successful realization of the decolonization process and to obstruct the important role that the Special Committee was mandated to play in that regard. In view of the fact that the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism would soon be at an end, the Special Committee needed to provide measurable indicators of success by the end of 2010 so that progress could be made and a future workplan for decolonization could be developed. It was clear that the great majority of the Territories would maintain their non-self-governing status in 2010, even once the ongoing internal constitutional reforms had been completed.

25. Territories subject to sovereignty disputes had been an important feature of the Special Committee's debates. Strong arguments had been articulated on whether such Territories should be addressed as decolonization matters, as sovereignty issues, or as a combination of both. While his delegation hoped that the Committee's ongoing deliberations on such matters in 2008 would shed light on the way forward, sovereignty disputes should not dominate the Special Committee's discussions or detract attention away from the legitimate interests of the small island Territories.

26. In that connection, his delegation proposed that an open-ended working group should be established to conduct an in-depth assessment of the small island Non-Self-Governing Territories and to provide recommendations to the Special Committee at its 2008 session. The working group would resume some of the functions of the former Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance and would be accommodated within existing resources.

27. **Mr. Smith** (Fiji) expressed his delegation's support for the work of the Special Committee and agreed that New Zealand's actions with respect to Tokelau provided a useful example of cooperation between administering Powers and Territories.

28. **Ms. Joseph** (Saint Lucia) said that the Special Committee had arrived at a very important juncture. With the notable exception of New Zealand, most of the administering Powers had discontinued their cooperation with the Committee on the issue of self-determination. Unless the Special Committee intensified its efforts to carry out the Plan of Implementation of the Decolonization Mandate 2006-2007 and the case-by-case work programmes, progress would continue to elude it. Meaningful progress could therefore only be made through innovative measures, since it had become clear that standard methods of work would not yield significant results. Her delegation would support all efforts to address those challenges and, to that end, would also support the idea proposed by the delegation of Dominica for the establishment of a working group.

29. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) reaffirmed his delegation's readiness to provide any support that might contribute to the success of the Committee's work.

30. **Mr. Botora** (Ethiopia) said that his country attached a high importance to the issue of decolonization and to the work of the Special Committee. In that connection, his delegation wished to express its full support to the Committee in its work to bring the decolonization process to an end.

Other matters

31. **The Chairman** said that the Committee would strictly apply the decision of the General Assembly concerning the waiver of a quorum, as it had in previous years. In accordance with that decision, the Committee's meetings would be convened without the presence of the quorum required under rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. However, the presence of a majority of the members would be required for any decision to be taken.

32. As in the past, it was his intention to convene one or two informal meetings of the Special Committee to consider the issues related to the organization of its next regional seminar and the dates of the seminar, as well as the composition of the Committee's delegation to the seminar.

33. Informal consultations on the possible venue and dates of the seminar would begin immediately. It was an established practice of the Committee to hold its seminar during the third week of May, which coincided with the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. It was his intention to conduct consultations in order to secure the holding of the 2008 seminar in the Pacific region.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.